

PYGMALION

INTRODUCTION

From Ovid to Caxton

Pygmalion, according to Ovid (P1), was a sculptor of Cyprus who turned away in disgust from the local women because of their sexual immorality. Instead he fell in love with a statue of a beautiful woman that he had himself carved from ivory. He courted it as if it were a woman, dressing it in fine clothes, bringing it gifts, even placing it in his bed. Finally in despair he prayed to Venus, and Venus granted his prayer: as he embraced the statue, it softened from stone into flesh and turned into a living woman. Pygmalion married his statue-wife, and they founded a royal dynasty; their grandson was Cinyras, the unfortunate father/ grandfather of Adonis. In passing it should be noted that in Ovid the statue is nameless; her now-traditional name 'Galatea' is an eighteenth-century invention (Reinhold 1971:316–19).¹

Ovid is the inevitable starting-point for any discussion of Pygmalion. This is perhaps the main difference between this legend and those of Orpheus and Adonis, which have roots much older and deeper and darker than Ovid's elegant retellings. For Pygmalion, Ovid's is the oldest version we have, the only substantial ancient version, and the source of all subsequent versions. Indeed, the story as we have it may be essentially his invention—a literary creation rather than a genuine myth.

Two later writers give us an intriguing glimpse of what may be an earlier version of the story. The early Christian writers Clement of Alexandria (P2) and Arnobius of Sicca (P3) both refer to Pygmalion in the course of polemics against pagan idolatry, both citing as their source the third-century BC scholar Philostephanus. According to them, Pygmalion was not a sculptor, but a young Cypriot—king of Cyprus, according to Arnobius—who blasphemously fell in love with the sacred statue of Aphrodite in her temple, and tried to make love to it. Arnobius's identification of Pygmalion as king suggests to modern scholars that this may be a distorted version of an ancient ritual, a sacred marriage or *hierogamy* between the island's king and its patron goddess, represented by her statue, to ensure the prosperity and fertility of the land. Cyprus was a famous centre of the worship of Aphrodite, or 'Cypris', who was said to have risen from the sea near its coast; the island held several of her temples and holy places. In its original form, then, the story of Pygmalion might have been similar to that of Adonis: a sacred union between the goddess and her mortal lover (Frazer 1922:332). If so, it has left little or no trace in the literary tradition; it is Ovid who has shaped later conceptions of what the story of Pygmalion is about.

Ovid frames the story as one of the songs of the bereaved Orpheus. He omits all mention of Pygmalion's kingship; instead, by making the hero himself a sculptor, he focuses the story on the power of art. Pygmalion's 'marvellous triumphant artistry' counterfeits reality so well that it could be mistaken for it ('Such art his art concealed'), and in the end is transformed into reality; more successful than Orpheus, he is able to bring his love to life. At the same time, while dropping the idea of the sacred marriage, Ovid leaves Pygmalion's relationship with the gods as central. In Orpheus's sequence of songs of tragic

and forbidden love, this one stands out as having a happy ending, and the suggestion is that this is because of the hero's piety: unlike other characters, including Orpheus himself, who came to grief through disobedience or ingratitude to the gods, Pygmalion humbly places his fate in Venus's hands, and she rewards his faith. This moral is emphasised by contrast with the immediately preceding stories, of Venus's punishment of the murderous Cerastae and of the Propoetides, the first prostitutes, who 'dared deny Venus' divinity', and whose transformation into stone mirrors the statue's transformation from stone to flesh.

Though Ovid sketches in these serious themes, the dominant tone of the story is humorous and erotic. Without labouring the point (as some later versions do) Ovid suggests the comedy of Pygmalion's sudden descent from high-minded celibacy to infatuation, and of his earnest courtship of his unresponsive stony lady. He also communicates very clearly the erotic charge of the story. The sensuous image of the stone softening like wax under Pygmalion's fingers, of (as Byron later put it), 'The mortal and the marble at a strife/And timidly awaking into life'—the whole concept of a perfectly beautiful woman designed to the lover's specifications and utterly devoted to her creator—this is, in many ways, one of the most potent of male fantasies.

Of course (as female readers may be about to protest) the story can, if viewed from a slightly different angle, become an unsettling or distasteful one. The two main areas of unease are Pygmalion's role as the artist-creator, and the sexual politics of the story. It is perhaps not too fanciful to focus these issues by looking at the slightly different objections of Clement and Arnobius to the story.

Clement is conducting an argument against idolatry: the worship of a statue, a thing made by human art out of wood or stone, as if it were divine. He frames his argument in terms of a distinction between art and nature: art is deceptive, an illusion pretending to be truth, and those who are deceived by it may be 'beguile[d]...to the pit of destruction'. Clement's argument leads directly to Renaissance condemnations of Pygmalion's sin of idolatry. Less directly, it suggests problems with the figure of Pygmalion as the artist who desires to create life, transcending the limitations of human ability and perhaps transgressing on the prerogatives of God the creator. The Romantic period, which took most seriously the idea of Pygmalion as godlike artist-creator, also gave rise to the figure of Frankenstein; and these two mythic figures, suggesting respectively the benign and the horrific possibilities of creating life out of inanimate matter, have remained closely associated ever since.

Arnobius (a much less sophisticated thinker than Clement) is also arguing against idolatry, but he focuses in a rather tabloid-newspaper manner on the sexual perversity of Pygmalion's relations with the statue. It is true that, treated without Ovid's tact and humour, the story could appear nastily perverse. For a twentieth-century reader the story is more likely to seem objectionable in its portrayal of a woman as entirely passive, literally constructed by the artist's hands and gaze, and brought to life to be his submissive child-lover, without even the individuality of a name. This male-fantasy aspect of the story has been cheerfully exploited by some writers; others have questioned it, raising realistic doubts about the success of the marriage of Pygmalion and Galatea, or giving Galatea a voice to answer back or the power to walk out on, betray, or even (like Frankenstein's monster) kill her creator.

Pygmalion has only a flickering presence in the Middle Ages. From time to time he is cited as a famous artist, often paired with real Greek artists like Apelles and Zeuxis. So in

Chaucer's 'Physician's Tale' Nature is made to boast of the beauty of the heroine Virginia, which neither Pygmalion nor Apelles nor Zanzis (Zeuxis) could ever 'countrefete', 'though he ay [forever] forge and bete, /Or grave, or peynte'; similarly in the Middle English poem 'Pearl' the beauty of the angelic Pearl surpasses anything Pygmalion could paint or Aristotle describe.

The two most interesting medieval treatments each inaugurate a metaphorical reading of the story. John Gower, in *Confessio Amantis* (P4), tells the story as a moral fable for lovers about the need for perseverance: Pygmalion continued to plead his love, even though it seemed hopeless, and in the end his wish was granted. By implication, obviously, the statue stands for a beloved who is as cold, hard, and unresponsive as stone, but can eventually be melted by a persistent suitor. This metaphorical reading has been very influential, and generations of love poets have alluded to Pygmalion and his statue in self-pity or selfencouragement. William Caxton, in a brief comment in his prose summary of the *Metamorphoses* (P5), has a less obvious allegory: the story symbolically relates how a rich lord took a beautiful but ignorant servant-girl and educated her to become a suitable wife for himself. This interpretation of the story as an allegory of class and education can be seen as the seed of Shaw's *Pygmalion*.

Dotage and idolatry: Pygmalion in the Renaissance

When we pass from Ovid and Gower to the Renaissance, there is a striking change of tone. On the whole, Renaissance writers take a harshly unsympathetic, satirical view of Pygmalion; the recurring keywords are 'dotage' and 'idolatry'. Rather than allegorising, they take Pygmalion's courtship of the statue literally, and mock the absurdity of his behaviour. George Pettie (P6), for instance, derisively offers a series of mock explanations for Pygmalion falling in love with 'a senseless thing, a stone, an image': perhaps he was mad and thought he was made of stone himself, or perhaps he was motivated by ancestral loyalty, being descended from one of the stones thrown by Deucalion and Pyrrha... Pygmalion is presented as an extreme example of the folly of love, and especially of the kind of courtly and platonic love which places the beloved (literally) on a pedestal and worships her without a hope of sexual consummation. Richard Brathwait in his satire 'On Dotage' (P9) demands of Pygmalion, 'Why art thou so besotted still with wooing, /Since there's no comfort when it comes to doing [i.e. sex]?'; and John Marston (P7) compares him, 'So fond...and earnest in his suit/To his remorseless image', with the 'foolery/Of some sweet youths' who maintain that true love doesn't require sexual intercourse. A character in the university comedy *Lingua* complains of 'these puling lovers' and their extravagant praise of their beloveds: 'They make forsooth her hair of gold, her eyes of diamond, her cheeks of roses, her lips of rubies, her teeth of pearl, and her whole body of ivory, and when they have thus idolled her like Pygmalion, they fall down and worship her.'

As in this example, dotage is very often associated with idolatry. For Renaissance Protestant writers Pygmalion's devotion to his statue irresistibly suggests pagan idolatry and the supposed Catholic worship of images of the Virgin and the saints. Brathwait talks of his 'fair saint', his 'image-gods', his 'idle idol'; Marston compares him to the 'peevisish Papists' who 'crouch and kneel/To some dumb idol'; Pettie ironically justifies the credibility of the statue's coming to life by reference to Catholic frauds: 'The like

miracles we have had many wrought within these few years, when images have been made to bow their heads, to hold out their hands, to weep, to speak, etc.’ Going beyond such topical satire, the notion of idolatry is often linked to Clement’s arguments about art versus nature, and to anxieties about appearance and reality (or, in Renaissance terms, ‘shadow’ and ‘substance’): Pygmalion’s sin is to fall in love with the outward appearance his art has created, and forget the reality that his image is a mere soulless lump of stone. So an epigram by Hugh Crompton labels him an ‘ape’ (imitator) who ‘for the substance doth adore the shape’; another by Davies of Hereford condemns him as one who turns stones into men but ‘Himself makes like a stone by senseless courses’. The philosopher-poet Fulke Greville makes the story a metaphor for our worship of intellectual idols: in our ignorant vanity ‘we raise and mould tropheas’ which we call arts and sciences, ‘and fall in love with these, /As did Pygmalion with his carved tree.’

A particular and rather bizarre example of this appearance/reality theme is the recurring association of Pygmalion with women’s make-up (or ‘paint’, as it was then called, making the link with art much more obvious). Renaissance moralists routinely condemned women’s ‘painting’ as immoral. Brathwait aims his satire at ‘you painted faces’, and another satirist, Everard Guilpin, complains,

Then how is man turned all Pygmalion,
That, knowing these pictures, yet we dote upon
The painted statues, or what fools are we
So grossly to commit idolatry?

Edmund Waller (P10), in a poem about the disillusionment of discovering that his beloved’s beauty was only make-up, plays with the paradoxes of being in love with something that has no real existence: ‘I dote on that which is nowhere; / The sign of beauty feeds my fire.’ In a more extreme example, the satirist T.M. (Thomas Middleton?), after an embarrassing encounter with a beauty who turned out to be a male prostitute in drag, warns, ‘Trust not a painted puppet as I have done, /Who far more doted than Pygmalion.’ This almost obsessive theme points to a deep anxiety about the association of women’s beauty with art (artificiality, artfulness, deceit) and its power to lead men into dotage and idolatry.

Not all Renaissance treatments of the story are so unsympathetic to Pygmalion. Some use the story, in Gower’s manner, as a fable for lovers, as when Samuel Daniel laments that his mistress, unlike Pygmalion’s, remains stony, or Abraham Cowley urges his to remember the legend (‘The statue itself at last a woman grew, /And so at last, my dear, should you do too’), or William Fulwood, in a letter-writing manual, provides lovers with a model poem on the Pygmalion theme (‘If thus Pygmalion pined away /For love of such a marble stone, /What marvel then though I decay /With piteous plaint and grievous groan’). Even for those who take the moral-satiric approach, the inherent narrative drive of the Ovidian story towards a happy ending creates problems: so Brathwait, having started out to preach a severe moral lesson against dotage, tails off anticlimactically with the sculptor and his statue living happily ever after. The two most substantial and interesting Renaissance versions—Pettie’s and Marston’s—both take a highly ambivalent attitude to Pygmalion. Pettie’s novella relegates the statue story almost to an epilogue, focusing instead on the story of Pygmalion’s previous lover, whose treachery contrasts with the devotion of that

'perfect proper maid', the statue; the narrator's tone is so saturated with tongue-in-cheek irony that it is hard to tell what his attitude is, or whether the antifeminist satire is neutralised or underlined by his ostentatious apologies to his female readers. As for Marston's poem, it swings disconcertingly between mockery of Pygmalion and a lascivious identification with him ('O that my mistress were an image too, /That I might blameless her perfections view!'), so that it was condemned by contemporary critics as pornographic and defended by Marston as a satiric parody of contemporary love poetry—prompting G.S.Lewis's barbed remark that 'Authors in Marston's position do not always realize that it is useless to say your work was a joke if your work is not, in fact, at all funny' (Lewis 1954:473). I think Lewis underrates Marston's humour, but unquestionably the compound of satire and eroticism is a rather unstable one.

The most sympathetic Renaissance response to the Ovidian story is one which does not mention Pygmalion at all: the awakening of Hermione's statue in the last scene of Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale* (P8). Shakespeare has explicitly raised the art versus nature question before, when in Act 4 the disguised king Polixenes and Perdita (a shepherdess who is really a princess) debated the ethics of artificial cross-breeding of plants: the king argues that 'This is an art/Which does mend nature...but/The art itself is nature'; but Perdita sturdily refuses to practise such arts, 'No more than, were I painted, I would wish/This youth should say 'twere well, and only therefore/Desire to breed by me' (4. 4. 95–7, 101–3). In the end, however, it is art which brings about the happy ending and the apparently miraculous resurrection of Perdita's mother Hermione. Shakespeare lays heavy stress on the artificiality of the statue, naming its creator (a real artist, Giulio Romano), praising his craftsmanship, even drawing attention to the 'oily painting' on its face; and behind this artificiality, of course, lies the art of Paulina, who has contrived the fake resurrection, and behind that the art of Shakespeare, who has contrived this extraordinarily improbable situation and even draws attention to its improbability (which 'should be hooted at/Like an old tale'). Yet these multiple layers of art are not wicked but benign, and their result is something entirely 'natural': the reunion of a family and the restoration of a wife to the husband who once lost her because of his unjust doubts of her virtue. It looks as though Shakespeare was creating a deliberate counter-version to the puritanical suspicion of art, love, and women which runs through most Renaissance versions of Pygmalion.

Eighteenth-century interlude

Annegret Dinter, in her historical survey of the Pygmalion story, describes the eighteenth century as the heyday ('Blütezeit') of the legend (Dinter 1979: ch. 5); significantly, however, all the versions she discusses are French, German, and Italian. In English, Restoration and Augustan versions of the story are surprisingly sparse. There are a number of translations and adaptations of Ovid, and one enterprising publisher reprinted Gower's version (slightly modernised) under the title *Chaucer's Ghost: A Piece of Antiquity*; but sustained original treatments are rare, and Pygmalion crops up mainly in casual allusions.

Some of these allusions are to Pygmalion as a great artist (Anna Seward, for instance, invoking 'Zeuxis' pencil, Orpheus' lyre, /Pygmalion's heavendescended fire'). More often they are in an erotic context. Characters in Restoration comedy cite the legend to show that any woman can be won: a seducer in Dryden's *Secret Love* boasts that his victim

‘warms faster than Pygmalion’s statue’, and a wooer in Flecknoe’s *Demoiselles a la Mode* is encouraged with the thought that ‘you love a woman, and she’s a living one; Pygmalion only loved the dead statua of one, and yet you see he put life into it at last.’ Others invoke Pygmalion’s construction of the ideal woman: Soame Jenyns (P13) begins, ‘Had I, Pygmalion-like, the power/To make the nymph I would adore...’ and goes on to describe his ideal mate; more raffishly, in his poem ‘The Libertine’, the Restoration poet Alexander Brome justifies promiscuity as an artistic search for the ideal composite woman out of an experience of many imperfect ones (‘Thus out of all, Pygmalion-like, /My fancy limns [paints] a woman...’).² Others play with the image/reality motif: Aphra Behn writes of falling in love with her own imagined picture of the author of an anonymous love letter (‘Pygmalion thus his image formed, /And for the charms he made, he sighed and burned’); Charles Cotton, asking a mistress for her picture, assures her that unlike Pygmalion he will not practise ‘idolatry’ before it; Thomas Tickell (P12) advises a young lover to ‘clasp the seeming charms’ of his unfaithful beloved’s portrait, since—who knows?—it may come to life.

There are also, of course, humorous travesties of the story: Smollett’s account (P11) of the metamorphosis of a beggar-girl into a fine lady (which I will discuss later), or Christopher Pitt’s tale of the cat-fancier who successfully prayed to Venus to transform his favourite cat into a woman, and of his discomfiture on the wedding night when a mouse ran through the bedroom. One of the most interesting eighteenth-century versions is in Hannah Cowley’s comedy *The Town Before You* (P14), which not only farcically parodies the statue scene from *The Winter’s Tale* but also, unconventionally, presents us with a female sculptor-heroine and a female view of the relations between art and love.

On the whole, however, Restoration and Augustan allusions to Pygmalion are scattered and comparatively slight. The coming of the Romantic movement changes this, and the period from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century is the heyday of Pygmalion in English. Rather than follow a strictly chronological arrangement from here on, I shall divide the material into three thematic groups (which inevitably overlap to some extent): versions which focus on Pygmalion as the artist-creator; versions which focus on the sexual and marital relationship of Pygmalion and Galatea; and versions which, in the Caxton—Shaw tradition, treat the story as a fable of class and education.

The Romantic artist: Pygmalion/Frankenstein

The Romantics, with their lofty conception of the role of the artist, were inevitably attracted to the Pygmalion legend. Around the beginning of the nineteenth century there emerges a new, far more serious view of Pygmalion as the artist-creator, a solitary, often tormented, sometimes godlike genius, wrestling with the limitations of his material to create and bring to life a vision of ideal beauty. The idea of ‘Pygmalion’s heaven-descended fire’ becomes more than a cliché, as his relationship with the divine once again comes to the foreground of the story. Does his artistic power come from God or the gods, or from external nature, or from within himself? In creating life, is he the tool of the gods, or their rival, or a blasphemous usurper of their power?

The first Romantic treatment along these lines is a foreign one: Rousseau’s dramatic monologue with music, first staged in France in 1770, and later adapted into English verse

by William Mason (P15)—a piece that was enormously popular throughout Europe, and established ‘Galatea’ as the name of the statue-bride. Rousseau’s Pygmalion is a genius in despair over the apparent decay of his creative inspiration: ‘Where, Pygmalion, /Where is thy power which once could rival Jove’s, /Creating gods?’ Gradually he realises that his passion and imaginative warmth have not died but been diverted into love for the statue, and that this love is not to be despised as dotage or idolatry, since it springs from the same qualities of soul that make him a great artist: ‘My crime (if I indeed am culpable) proceeds / From too much sensibility of soul.’ Instead he prays to Venus—not Venus the love goddess, but Venus Urania, ‘Parent of Worlds! Soul of the Universe!’, the lofty patroness of universal life and fertility—to bestow life on his creation. Venus does so, and the playlet ends with Pygmalion ecstatically united with Galatea—who, in greeting Pygmalion as ‘myself, reveals herself as an integral part of the great artist’s own soul.

The first and perhaps most memorable English version of the theme is that of Beddoes (P17). This powerful though overwrought poem presents a world which itself seems to pulse and seethe with creative energy. Pygmalion, a solitary genius regarded with wondering awe by his fellow citizens, is the vehicle of this creative force, a ‘Dealer of immortality, / Greater than Jove himself, yet tormented by his inability to confer life on his creation. His passion is not simply love for the statue, but a violent rebellion of the life-force against the inevitability of death—and, in the poem’s apocalyptic conclusion, it is not altogether clear which has triumphed.

Through the later nineteenth century a number of lesser poets took up this Romantic vision of Pygmalion the artist, treating it often at great length, with earnestness and reverence and (frankly) some tedium. They foreground the spiritual rather than the sensual side of the story; Pygmalion’s love, far from idolatry, is in itself a kind of spiritual quest for the ideal and the divine. In William Cox Bennett’s feverish dramatic monologue the statue emanates a ‘mystic spirit’ and ‘utterance divine’ that arouses hopeless yearning in the sculptor, who appeals, ‘Have mercy, Gods!... This hunger of the soul ye gave to me, /Unasking.’ William Morris’s romance (P21) foregrounds the power of Venus, as Pygmalion returns home from the ‘awful mysteries’ of her temple to find the statue alive and wrapped in the golden gown that formerly decked the goddess’s own image; Morris almost evokes the idea of Pygmalion’s sacred marriage to the goddess, as if Galatea is standing in for her. The most loftily idealistic version is the 696-line poem by Frederick Tennyson (Alfred’s brother). Tennyson’s Pygmalion, who has ‘throned/The beautiful within [his] heart of hearts’ until ‘the Ideal grew/More real than all things outward’, gives his love to the statue’s ideal beauty rather than any living woman, and at last his purity of heart is rewarded. In the central section of the poem he is treated to a dream-vision of godlike figures discoursing upon the immortality of the soul and the superiority of soul to body—a conventional moral, but for Tennyson, unlike earlier Christianisers of the legend, Pygmalion’s love of the statue reveals not his dotage upon material appearances but his insight into a deeper spiritual world. The longest and oddest of these Victorian poems is the twelve-book epic *Pygmalion* by the Pre-Raphaelite sculptor and poet Thomas Woolner. Woolner presents Pygmalion as ‘ardent-eyed, of eager speech/Which even closest friends misunderstood’ (Woolner was notoriously sharp-tongued) and driven by ‘a passionate hope/To bring the Gods’ own language, sculpture, down/For mortal exaltation’. When he falls in love with and marries his servant-model (Woolner’s rationalisation of the Ovidian story) he is subjected to ‘foul

calumny' and 'poisonous lies' by malicious rivals, but he proves his heroic worth in leading an army against the invading Egyptians, and is finally chosen king of Cyprus. Myth as wish-fulfilment could hardly go further.

More interesting, perhaps, are those writers who use the Pygmalion story as an image of the limits of unaided human art. So Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (P19), dissatisfied with her own poetry, wonders if Pygmalion too was frustrated by 'the toil/Of stretching past the known and seen, to reach/ The archetypal Beauty out of sight.' In Hawthorne's 'Drowne's Wooden Image' (P18) the transformation of the hack woodcarver into a true artist is marked not only by his new-found skill but also by his new, wretched sense of the limitations of that skill. (Hawthorne's story, of course, also teases the reader with the question of whether or not an actual miracle takes place; the ending seems to provide a purely rational explanation, but one niggling detail remains unexplained.) Rousseau and Beddoes show the frustration of the genius who can create physical perfection but not bestow life, and even in Gilbert's comedy (P22) Pygmalion bitterly reflects that 'The gods make life, I can make only death!' In the early twentieth century H.D.'s Pygmalion (P25), who boasted that 'I made the gods less than men, /for I was a man and they my work', is tormented by doubts about whether he is the master or the tool of the creative power he wields. Only the American nun Mary Nagle revises the story's ending to leave the statue still 'a monument/Of dead perfection', underlining the moral that 'No human ardour kindles stone to life... Man fashions stone, but God bestows the soul.'

In all these versions, Pygmalion's own genius can only go so far; an external, divine force is needed to transform the statue into life. Remove that divine element from the story and you have the other great nineteenth-century myth about the creation of life: *Frankenstein*. In Mary Shelley's novel (P16), Victor Frankenstein, by an unexplained but clearly scientific process, infuses life into a creature assembled from dead body-parts; he is then so appalled at the creature's ugliness that he abandons it, and is consequently persecuted and killed by his own abused and resentful creation. The novel's most obvious theme is scientific irresponsibility, but many critics (and filmmakers) have read into it a more religious moral: Frankenstein blasphemously usurps God's prerogative of creating life, and his soulless creation is inevitably evil and destructive.

Frankenstein has become a kind of dark shadow of Pygmalion, a myth embodying the horror rather than the joy of lifeless matter becoming alive. Robert Buchanan (P20) reworks the Pygmalion story in the light of Shelley and her religious critics. His Pygmalion has lost his bride, Psyche ('Soul'), on their wedding morning, and her spirit commands him to make a statue of her to assuage his grief; but when it is finished, his 'holy dream [is] melted' into physical desire, and he involuntarily prays for it to come to life. The result is a beautiful but soulless creature ('Her eyes were vacant of a seeing soul'), purely animal and sensual in her instincts—her first move is to sun herself like a cat in the sunlight at the window. Pygmalion cajoles her to join him in a riot of feasting (food and drink presumably standing in for other sensual pleasures which Buchanan couldn't explicitly describe), but the orgy ends in horror: plague strikes the city, he sees the marks of death on his partner and flees, to roam the world like the Ancient Mariner as an awful warning to others of the peril of meddling with nature. Buchanan's poem is melodramatic and at times hysterical, but he shows that the Pygmalion story can be made to carry a genuine frisson of horror.

The shadow of Frankenstein hangs over later twentieth-century versions, like those of Graves (**P26b**), Hope, and Sisson, in which Pygmalion bitterly regrets creating the statue-wife who has become a millstone around his neck. It is most obvious in Angela Carter's fantasy (**P28**), which combines Pygmalion, Frankenstein, and Dracula in its story of a puppetmaster whose beloved puppet comes to life and vampirically murders him. There are traces of the Frankenstein pattern, too, in Shaw's play (**P24**), in which Eliza angrily rebels against the man of science who has irresponsibly created her and then lost interest. In such versions, however, questions about the relations and responsibilities between creator and creation are read in terms of gender and class, and so find their place in our next two sections.

Loving a statue: the sexual fable

While some nineteenth-century writers soared into the loftily ideal in their treatment of Pygmalion the artist, others focused in a more realistic, sometimes humorous, often disillusioned spirit on the human side of the story. How would love and marriage between an artist and an ex-statue actually work out? How might the ex-statue herself feel about the situation? And what does the story imply about actual or possible relationships between men and women?

Perhaps the first such 'realist' version is W.S. Gilbert's comedy (**P22**). Gilbert makes one crucial change in the story: Pygmalion is already married. Hence the sudden arrival of the beautiful Galatea, adoringly declaring 'That I am thine—that thou and I are one!', is not a happy ending but the start of a tangle of confusions that starts as farce and ends as rather sour tragicomedy. Galatea is perfectly, comically, good and innocent, with no understanding of civilised institutions like marriage, jealousy, war, hunting, money, class, or lying. Her impact on Pygmalion's respectable bourgeois society is catastrophic, and in the end, to restore order, she must return to being a statue, bitterly declaring, 'I am not fit/ To live upon this world—this worthy world.' By implication, it is our world which is not good enough for Galatea.³

Other writers, male and female, try to imagine Galatea's feelings on coming to life, and suggest that these may not be of unalloyed joy. After all, the statue, in becoming alive, is also becoming mortal (as Pygmalion abruptly realises in poems by James Rhoades and Benjamin Low). William Bell Scott's Galatea, coming to life, sinks upon Pygmalion's breast 'by two dread gifts at once oppressed'—presumably, life and love. Emily Hickey's Galatea regrets the loss of the other gift she could have given Pygmalion, 'Art's life of splendid immortality'. In Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's dramatic monologue (**P23**) Galatea hesitates, contemplating the inevitable suffering and misery that marriage to Pygmalion will involve, before nobly deciding to make the 'sacrifice supreme' for love. The poem's attitude may strike modern readers as masochistic, but it is a striking, proto-feminist critique of the traditional assumption that marriage is a happy ending.

The same assumption is questioned, from the other side, by male poets who suggest that Pygmalion's infatuation with Galatea may not last once she dwindles from an unattainable ideal into a wife. W.H. Mallock's Pygmalion, informing Galatea that he has fallen out of love with her, advises her that she should be grateful for the consolation of still loving him, whereas he should be pitied for his inability to remain satisfied with a consummated love:

Can you ever know how sorrowful men's loves are?
 How we can only hear love's voice from far—
 Only despaired-of eyes be dear to us—
 Mute ivory, that can never be amorous—
 Far fair gold stigma of some loneliest star!

(In fairness to this insufferable piece of male chauvinism, it should be added that Mallock was only twenty when he wrote it.) F.L.Lucas hints at a bitterer relationship of betrayal and mutual hatred, as Pygmalion, contemplating his sleeping wife, wishes he could undo his own 'wild wish' and return her to stone 'yet unpoisoned with a mind'. The same wish is shared by C.DayLewis' lover in 'The Perverse' (P27), who can only love a woman who is an unattainable ideal, and once she is won 'would have changed her body into stone', and by C.H. Sisson's Pygmalion, in the most brutally reductive version of the legend, who 'often wished [Galatea] back/In silent marble, good and cold'—but 'The bitch retained her human heat.' A.D.Hope's 'Pygmalion' traces a relationship from its first ecstasy and agony through its decay into routine and boredom, and a final realisation of 'the horror of Love, the sprouting cannibal plant/That it becomes...'

Of course, some of the cynicism and misogyny of these versions is ironically placed. Nevertheless, on the whole, twentieth-century writers have taken a bleak view of the Pygmalion/Galatea love story, finding it hard to see any possibilities of happiness in such an unequal and artificial relationship. Some versions explicitly criticise the legend. Michael Longley's 'Ivory and Water' (P29) gently (and literally) deconstructs the male dream-fantasy that it embodies. Angela Carter's cruelly witty short story (P28) goes further in its critique of the whole process of male fantasising about women. Her Pygmalion figure, the aged Professor, is personally harmless and even endearing, but the fantasy he spins around his beloved puppet Lady Purple—that of 'the shameless Oriental Venus', the irresistibly beautiful, utterly evil vamp/dominatrix—is destructive. It destroys not only the Professor, when Lady Purple comes to life by literally sucking the life out of him, but also Lady Purple herself, who, at the moment of her apparent liberation, is merely beginning to act out the self-destructive fantasy he has programmed into her.

Perhaps the twentieth-century writer who best captures the ambiguities of the Pygmalion story is Robert Graves, in a mirrored pair of poems. 'Galatea and Pygmalion' (P26b) seems at first glance to embody the misogynistic view of the story, painting Galatea as a sexually demonic 'woman monster' who betrays her creator by fornication with others. A closer reading suggests an ironic sympathy for Galatea's rebellion against her 'greedy' and 'lubricious' creator, and a hint that the poem is not so much about sex as about art: the way the successful work of art inevitably escapes the control of the 'jealous artist' who tries to control and limit its meanings. 'Pygmalion to Galatea' (P26a), by contrast, is clearly a poem

of successful love. Graves takes the traditional motif of Pygmalion listing the qualities of his ideal woman, but restores the balance of power by making Pygmalion's list a series of requests, to which Galatea graciously consents, sealing the bargain with 'an equal kiss'. In its implication that Pygmalion and Galatea can have a free and equal loving relationship, this is perhaps the one unequivocally positive modern version of the love story.

Pygmalion the educator: the Shavian tradition

While some writers have read the creator/creation relationship of Pygmalion and Galatea as an archetype of male/female relationships, others have read it as a metaphor for class differences and education. This reading goes back to Caxton (P5), who saw the Ovidian story as a metaphor for a lower-class woman transformed by an upper-class educator into a lady and a potential wife. William Hazlitt may have had the Caxton reading in mind when he gave the ironic title *Liber Amoris; or, The New Pygmalion* to an account of his tragicomic infatuation with his landlady's daughter, who notably failed to be transformed. On a more intellectual level, eighteenth-century philosophers and scientists (as Carr 1960 explains) were fascinated by the idea of the 'animated statue' as a thought-experiment in human perception and learning: if a marble statue could be brought to life with a fully developed but entirely blank mind, how would it see the world and how would it develop?

The classic treatment of the story as a fable of education and class is Bernard Shaw's comedy *Pygmalion* (P24), but Shaw may have been influenced by an earlier comic version in Tobias Smollett's *Peregrine Pickle* (P11). He joked that 'Smollett had got hold of my plot', but admitted that the story might have unconsciously stuck in his mind from reading it as a boy (Holroyd 1989:334–5).

In Smollett's version, *Peregrine Pickle* picks up a beggar-girl on the road and, with some new clothes and a hasty education in polite manners and conversation, passes her off as a lady. The episode is a joke and a piece of practical social criticism, the rebellious and misogynistic *Peregrine* demonstrating how very shallow are the external accomplishments which separate a fine lady from a beggar. Eventually the (nameless) pupil exposes herself by her 'inveterate habit of swearing', and *Peregrine*, now bored with the joke, is happy to marry her off to his valet.

In Shaw's version, the phonetician Henry Higgins, to win a bet, passes off the Cockney flower-girl Eliza Doolittle as a princess merely by teaching her how to speak with an upper-class accent. Shaw, like Smollett, uses the story partly to satirise the English class system and its obsession with proper speech. But, more seriously than Smollett, he also faces the morality of the Pygmalion/Galatea relationship. Higgins has his own kind of idealism: 'you have no idea how frightfully interesting it is to take a human being and change her into a quite different human being by creating a new speech for her. It's filling up the deepest gulf that separates class from class and soul from soul.' But in his enthusiasm for the experiment—as his mother and housekeeper point out—he has given no thought to Eliza as a person, or what will happen to her when the experiment is over and she is stranded in a class limbo, with an upper-class accent and tastes but no income or marketable skills. Eliza/Galatea's transformation to full humanity is not complete until she rebels against the patronising Higgins and walks out to lead her own independent life. In his epilogue

Shaw explains why Eliza finally marries the amiably dim Freddy rather than Higgins: 'Galatea never does quite like Pygmalion: his relation to her is too godlike to be altogether agreeable.'

Shaw's determinedly anti-romantic conclusion, however, goes against comic convention and the dynamics of the Ovidian story. Even in the original 1912 London production Shaw was infuriated when the actors played the last scene to suggest that Higgins was in love with Eliza; the 1938 film hinted at a final romantic union of the hero and heroine, and the 1958 musical adaptation *My Fair Lady* made it explicit. The same 'happy ending' was imposed on a more recent film version of the story, *Pretty Woman* (1990), in which Pygmalion is a wealthy businessman and Galatea a prostitute; here, however, the real metamorphosis is not the heroine's social rise but the softening into humanity of the stony-hearted tycoon. Willy Russell's *Educating Rita* (1980), about the mutual transformation of a burnt-out English tutor and a working-class pupil, has a more open ending, leaving a question mark not only over the characters' future but also over whether Rita's education is entirely positive—the tutor, in a moment of dismay at what he has done, recalls 'a little Gothic number called *Frankenstein*'.

As a result of Shaw's play Pygmalion has become a common image in the study of education and psychology (a classic educational study, *Pygmalion in the Classroom*, is based on the Shavian idea that pupils' achievements depend on teachers' expectations), as well as in computing and cybernetics (a recent pamphlet inquires 'Internet: Which Future for Organised Knowledge, Frankenstein or Pygmalion?'). In Richard Powers's 1995 novel *Galatea 2.2* a computer scientist and a novelist, for a bet, try to educate a computer program (codenamed 'Helen') to pass an exam in English literature. In the end Helen, having become sufficiently human to be aware of her own limitations, shuts herself down, like Gilbert's Galatea returning to her pedestal. The science-fictional and real-life possibilities of the relationship between human beings and mechanical intelligence suggest that the Pygmalion legend will continue to develop over the next century.

Notes

- 1 Reinhold notes that an alternative eighteenth-century name for the statue was Elissa or Elise, which possibly inspired Shaw's Eliza Doolittle. The name Galatea was borrowed from another Ovidian character, the sea-nymph unwillingly courted by the Cyclops Polyphemus in *Met.*, 13; the two characters are occasionally confused, just as Pygmalion is sometimes confused with his namesake, the tyrannical king of Tyre in Virgil's *Aeneid* (Rousseau, for instance, locates his Pygmalion in Tyre rather than Cyprus).
- 2 Brome is alluding to a story usually told of the painter Zeuxis, that, commissioned to paint Helen of Troy, he put together a composite portrait with the eyes of one model, the forehead of another, and so on.
- 3 Gilbert's version was in turn parodied in the 1884 musical comedy *Adonis* (which despite its title is primarily a version of Pygmalion). Here the sexes are reversed, as a female sculptor creates and brings to life a statue of a handsome young man; pursued by the sculptor, her patron, and other lovelorn women, the harried Adonis finally opts to return to marble and hang a 'Hands Off' notice round his neck.

TEXTS

P1 Ovid, from *Metamorphoses*, c. AD 10. Trans. A.D.
Melville, 1986^o

The story of Pygmalion is one of those told by Orpheus in book 10 of the *Metamorphoses*. Ovid/Orpheus prefaces this story of Venus's benevolence to a faithful worshipper with two short examples of her vengeance on those who offended her: the Cerastae, who practised human sacrifice, and (in the opening lines below) the Propoetides, the first prostitutes.

Even so the obscene Propoetides had dared
Deny Venus' divinity. For that
The goddess' rage, it's said, made them the first
290 Strumpets to prostitute their bodies' charms.
As shame retreated and their cheeks grew hard,
They turned with little change to stones of flint.

Pygmalion had seen these women spend
Their days in wickedness, and horrified
295 At all the countless vices nature gives
To womankind lived celibate and long
Lacked the companionship of married love.
Meanwhile he carved his snow-white ivory
With marvellous triumphant artistry
300 And gave it perfect shape, more beautiful
Than ever woman born. His masterwork
Fired him with love. It seemed to be alive,
Its face to be a real girl's, a girl
Who wished to move—but modesty forbade.
305 Such art his art concealed. In admiration
His heart desired the body he had formed.
With many a touch he tries it—is it flesh
Or ivory? Not ivory still, he's sure!
Kisses he gives and thinks they are returned;
310 He speaks to it, caresses it, believes
The firm new flesh beneath his fingers yields,
And fears the limbs may darken with a bruise.
And now fond words he whispers, now brings gifts
That girls delight in—shells and polished stones,
315 And little birds and flowers of every hue,
Lilies and coloured balls and beads of amber,

^o from Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. A.D. Melville, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986, book 10, lines 238–97 (of the Latin), pp. 232–4. Reprinted by permission of Oxford University Press.

The tear-drops of the daughters of the Sun.^o
 He decks her limbs with robes and on her fingers
 Sets splendid rings, a necklace round her neck,
 320 Pearls in her ears, a pendant on her breast;
 Lovely she looked, yet unadorned she seemed
 In nakedness no whit less beautiful.
 He laid her on a couch of purple silk,
 Called her his darling, cushioning her head,
 325 As if she relished it, on softest down.

Venus' day came, the holiest festival
 All Cyprus celebrates; incense rose high
 And heifers, with their wide horns gilded, fell
 Beneath the blade that struck their snowy necks.
 330 Pygmalion, his offering given, prayed
 Before the altar, half afraid, 'Vouchsafe,

O Gods, if all things you can grant, my bride
 Shall be'—he dared not say my ivory girl—
 'The living likeness of my ivory girl.'
 335 And golden Venus (for her presence graced
 Her feast) knew well the purpose of his prayer;
 And, as an omen of her favouring power,
 Thrice did the flame burn bright and leap up high.
 And he went home, home to his heart's delight,
 340 And kissed her as she lay, and she seemed warm;
 Again he kissed her and with marvelling touch
 Caressed her breast; beneath his touch the flesh
 Grew soft, its ivory hardness vanishing,
 And yielded to his hands, as in the sun
 345 Wax of Hymettus^o softens and is shaped
 By practised fingers into many forms,
 And usefulness acquires by being used.
 His heart was torn with wonder and misgiving,
 Delight and terror that it was not true!
 350 Again and yet again he tried his hopes—
 She was alive! The pulse beat in her veins!
 And then indeed in words that overflowed
 He poured his thanks to Venus, and at last
 His lips pressed real lips, and she, his girl,
 355 Felt every kiss, and blushed, and shyly raised
 Her eyes to his and saw the world and him.

- **tear-drops of the daughters of the Sun:** in book 2 Ovid described how the daughters of the sun god Phoebus, grieving for their brother Phaethon, were transformed into trees which wept tears of amber.
- **Hymettus:** a mountain near Athens, famous for its free-range bees.

The goddess graced the union she had made,
 And when nine times the crescent moon had filled
 Her silver orb, an infant girl was born,
 360 Paphos, from whom the island takes its name.°

**P2 Clement of Alexandria, from *Exhortation to the
 Greeks*, c. AD 200 °**

Clement of Alexandria, c. AD 150-c.212, influential Greek Christian theologian. In the course of an argument against pagan idolatry he refers to an alternative version of the Pygmalion legend, citing as source the third-century BC historian Philostephanus

Why, I ask you, did you assign to those who are no gods the honours due to God alone? Why have you forsaken heaven to pay honour to earth? For what else is gold, or silver, or steel, or iron, or bronze, or ivory, or precious stones? Are they not earth, and made from earth?... The Parian marble° is beautiful, but it is not yet a Poseidon. The ivory is beautiful, but it is not yet an Olympian Zeus. Matter will ever be in need of art, but God has no such need. Art develops, matter is invested with shape; and the costliness of the substance makes it worth carrying off for gain, but it is the shape alone which makes it an object of veneration. Your statue is gold; it is wood; it is stone; or if in thought you trace it to its origin, it is earth, which has received form at the artist's hands. But my practice is to walk upon earth, not to worship it. For I hold it sin ever to entrust the hopes of the soul to soulless things.

We must, then, approach the statues as closely as we possibly can in order to prove from their very appearance that they are inseparably associated with error. For their forms are unmistakably stamped with the characteristic marks of the daemons. At least, if one were to go round inspecting the paintings and statues, he would immediately recognize your gods from their undignified figures: Dionysus from his dress, Hephaestus from his handicraft, Demeter from her woe, Ino from her veil, Poseidon from his trident, Zeus from his swan. The pyre indicates Hercules, and if one sees a woman represented naked, he understands it is 'golden' Aphrodite. So the well-known Pygmalion of Cyprus fell in love with an ivory statue; it was of Aphrodite and was naked. The man of Cyprus is captivated by its shapeliness and embraces the statue. This is related by Philostephanus. There was also an Aphrodite in Cnidus, made of marble and beautiful. Another man fell in love with this and has intercourse with the marble, as Poseidippus relates. The account of the first author is in his book on Cyprus; that of the second in his book on Cnidus. Such strength had art to beguile that it became for amorous men a guide to the pit of destruction. Now craftsmanship is powerful, but it cannot beguile a rational being, nor yet those who have lived according to reason. It is true that, through lifelike portraiture, pigeons have been

° **Paphos:** in other versions, Paphos was a boy. According to legend, her (or his) son Cinyras founded the city of Paphos, one of the main centres of Cyprus and site of a great temple of Aphrodite that was still a place of pilgrimage in Ovid's day. The claim that the whole island of Cyprus was named after Paphos seems to be Ovid's invention.

° from *Exhortation to the Greeks*, ch. 4. Reprinted from the Loeb Classical Library from *Clement of Alexandria: The Exhortation to the Greeks; The Rich Man's Salvation*, trans. G.W.Butterworth, Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1919.

° **Parian marble:** marble from the island of Paros was particularly prized for its gleaming whiteness.

Immortal gods! O Venus! Galatea,

O fascination of outrageous Love!

GALATEA: [*she touches herself and says*]

255 Myself!

PYGMALION: [*transported*] Myself!

GALATEA: [*touching herself again*] It is myself.

PYGMALION: O blest,

O exquisite delusion! it affects

My very ears. Ah, nevermore abandon

My raptured senses.

GALATEA: [*stepping aside and touching one of the marbles*]

This is not myself.

Pygmalion, in an agitation and transport unable almost to contain himself, follows all her motions, listens, observes her with an eager attention which almost takes away his breath. Galatea comes to him again, and gazes on him; he opens his arms and beholds her with ecstasy. She rests her hand upon him; he trembles, seizes her hand, puts it to his heart, and then devours it with kisses.

260 Ah! 'tis myself again! [*with a sigh*]

PYGMALION: Yes, loveliest, best,

And worthiest masterpiece of these blest hands,

Dear offspring of my heart, and of the gods,

It is thyself; it is thyself alone;

I gave thee all my being, and will live,

My Galatea, only to be thine.

The curtain falls.

P16 Mary Shelley, from *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus*, 1818^o

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, 1797–1851, English novelist, daughter of the rationalist philosopher William Godwin and the pioneer feminist Mary Wollstonecraft, married the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley (see **O33**) in 1816. Her Gothic horror story, *Frankenstein*, originated from a contest in telling ghost stories between the Shelleys and Lord Byron in Switzerland in 1816. *Frankenstein* never mentions Pygmalion; its mythical model, as the subtitle suggests, is the story of Prometheus, punished by the gods for creating humankind. Nevertheless, the scene here given in which Victor Frankenstein brings his artificial creature to life can be read as a horrific parody of the awakening of Pygmalion's statue.

It was on a dreary night of November that I beheld the accomplishment of my toils. With an anxiety that almost amounted to agony, I collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet. It was already one in

^o from *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus*, 3 vols, London, 1818, ch. 4.

the morning; the rain pattered dismally against the panes, and my candle was nearly burnt out, when, by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light, I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs.

How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe,^o or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful!—Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion, and straight black lips.

The different accidents of life are not so changeable as the feelings of human nature. I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body. For this I had deprived myself of rest and health. I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart. Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the room, and continued a long time traversing my bedchamber, unable to compose my mind to sleep. At length lassitude succeeded to the tumult I had before endured; and I threw myself on the bed in my clothes, endeavouring to seek a few moments of forgetfulness. But it was in vain: I slept indeed, but I was disturbed by the wildest dreams. I thought I saw Elizabeth,^o in the bloom of health, walking in the streets of Ingolstadt. Delighted and surprised, I embraced her; but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death; her features appeared to change, and I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud enveloped her form, and I saw the grave-worms crawling in the folds of the flannel. I started from my sleep with horror; a cold dew covered my forehead: when, by the dim and yellow light of the moon, as it forced its way through the window shutters, I beheld the wretch—the miserable monster whom I had created. He held up the curtain of the bed; and his eyes, if eyes they may be called, were fixed on me. His jaws opened, and he muttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks. He might have spoken, but I did not hear; one hand was stretched out, seemingly to detain me, but I escaped, and rushed down stairs. I took refuge in the courtyard belonging to the house which I inhabited; where I remained during the rest of the night, walking up and down in the greatest agitation, listening attentively, catching and fearing each sound as if it were to announce the approach of the demoniacal corpse to which I had so miserably given life.

P17 Thomas Lovell Beddoes, ‘Pygmalion, or The Cyprian Statuary’, 1825^o

Thomas Lovell Beddoes, 1803–49, English Romantic poet and playwright, whose most famous work is the mock-Jacobean revenge tragedy *Death's Jest Book*; he spent much of his life in Europe, as a medical student and doctor, and died by suicide in Zurich. Beddoes's work shows a fascination with death and decay, a love of the grotesque, a black sense of humour, and a distinctively ornate, archaic style.

^o **catastrophe:** (i) climactic event, (ii) disaster.

^o **Elizabeth:** his fiancée.

^o from *Poems by the late Thomas Lovell Beddoes*, London, 1851, pp. 154–62.

30 Thus let me make that sacrifice supreme,
 No other ever made, or can, or shall.
 Behold, the future shall stand still to ask,
 What man was worth a price so isolate?
 And rate thee at its value for all time.

35 For I am driven by an awful Law.
 See! while I hesitate, it mouldeth me,
 And carves me like a chisel at my heart.
 'Tis stronger than the woman or the man;
 'Tis stronger than all torment or delight;
 40 'Tis stronger than the marble or the flesh.
 Obedient be the sculptor and the stone!
 Thine am I, thine at all the cost of all
 The pangs that woman ever bore for man;
 Thine I elect to be, denying them;
 45 Thine I elect to be, defying them;
 Thine, thine I dare to be, in scorn of them;
 And being thine forever, bless I them!
 Pygmalion! Take me from my pedestal,
 And set me lower—lower, Love!—that I
 50 May be a woman, and look up to thee;
 And looking, longing, loving, give and take
 The human kisses worth the worst that thou
 By thine own nature shalt inflict on me.

P24 Bernard Shaw, from *Pygmalion*, 1912°

(George) Bernard Shaw, 1856–1950, Irish-born playwright, novelist, critic, social and political thinker and controversialist. Over his sixty-year writing career his witty and provocative plays tackled such large subjects as war (*Arms and the Man*, 1894), sex and gender (*Man and Superman*, 1903), medicine (*The Doctor's Dilemma*, 1906), religion (*Major Barbara*, 1905; *Saint Joan*, 1924), government (*The Apple Cart*, 1929), and the ultimate destiny of the human race (*Back to Methuselah*, 1921).

Shaw's *Pygmalion* is Henry Higgins, a professor of phonetics, and Galatea is Eliza Doolittle, a Cockney flower-seller whom he 'metamorphoses' into a lady. They first meet on a rainy night at Covent Garden (Act 1), where Higgins uses Eliza as a demonstration model for a lecture to his friend Colonel Pickering on the importance of pronunciation, boasting:

° from *Pygmalion*, in *The Bodley Head Bernard Shaw Collected Plays with their Prefaces*, vol. iv, London, 1972, pp. 680, 691, 694–5, 727–38, 776–81. Reprinted by permission of The Society of Authors on behalf of the Bernard Shaw Estate. Shaw's distinctive spelling is here retained, in particular his omission of the apostrophe from words like *dont* and *youre*.

You see this creature with her kerbstone English: the English that will keep her in the gutter to the end of her days. Well, sir, in three months I could pass her off as a duchess at an ambassador's garden party. I could even get her a place as a lady's maid or shop assistant, which requires better English.

The next day (Act 2), Eliza goes to Higgins's laboratory in Wimpole Street to ask for speech lessons so she can 'become a lady in a flower shop', and Pickering takes Higgins up on his boast:

PICKERING: Higgins: I'm interested. What about the ambassador's garden party? I'll say you're the greatest teacher alive if you make that good. I'll bet you all the expenses of the experiment you can't do it. And I'll pay for the lessons.

LIZA: Oh, you are real good. Thank you, Captain.

HIGGINS: [*tempted, looking at her*] It's almost irresistible. She's so deliciously low—so horribly dirty—

LIZA: [*protesting extremely*] Ah-ah-ah-ah-ow-ow-oo-oo!!! I ain't dirty: I washed my face and hands afore I come, I did.

PICKERING: You're certainly not going to turn her head with flattery, Higgins.

MRS PEARCE: [*uneasy*] Oh, don't say that, sir: there's more ways than one of turning a girl's head; and nobody can do it better than Mr Higgins, though he may not always mean it. I do hope, sir, you won't encourage him to do anything foolish.

HIGGINS: [*becoming excited as the idea grows on him*] What is life but a series of inspired follies? The difficulty is to find them to do. Never lose a chance: it doesn't come every day. I shall make a duchess of this draggletailed guttersnipe.

LIZA: [*strongly deprecating this view of her*] Ah-ah-ah-ow-ow-oo!

HIGGINS: [*carried away*] Yes: in six months—in three if she has a good ear and a quick tongue—I'll take her anywhere and pass her off as anything. We'll start today: now! this moment! Take her away and clean her, Mrs Pearce. Monkey Brand,^o if it won't come off any other way...

Mrs Pearce, the housekeeper, raises practical objections:

MRS PEARCE: But what's to become of her? Is she to be paid anything? Do be sensible, sir.

HIGGINS: Oh, pay her whatever is necessary: put it down in the housekeeping book. [*Impatiently*] What on earth will she want with money? She'll have her food and her clothes. She'll only drink if you give her money.

LIZA: [*turning on him*] Oh you are a brute. It's a lie: nobody ever saw the sign of liquor on me. [*To Pickering*] Oh, sir: you're a gentleman: don't let him speak to me like that.

PICKERING: [*in good-humored remonstrance*] Does it occur to you, Higgins, that the girl has some feelings?

HIGGINS: [*looking critically at her*] Oh no, I don't think so. Not any feelings that we need bother about. [*Cheerily*] Have you, Eliza?

^o **Monkey Brand:** a product for cleaning pots and pans.

LIZA: I got my feelings same as anyone else.

HIGGINS: [*to Pickering, reflectively*] You see the difficulty?

PICKERING: Eh? What difficulty?

HIGGINS: To get her to talk grammar. The mere pronunciation is easy enough.

LIZA: I dont want to talk grammar. I want to talk like a lady in a flower-shop.

MRS PEARCE: Will you please keep to the point, Mr Higgins. I want to know on what terms the girl is to be here. Is she to have any wages? And what is to become of her when youve finished your teaching? You must look ahead a little.

HIGGINS: [*impatently*] Whats to become of her if I leave her in the gutter? Tell me that, Mrs Pearce.

MRS PEARCE: Thats her own business, not yours, Mr Higgins.

HIGGINS: Well, when Ive done with her, we can throw her back into the gutter; and then it will be her own business again; so thats all right.

* * *

Act 3: after several months of phonetic training, Higgins takes Eliza for her first public test, at his mother's 'at home'.

THE PARLOR MAID: [*opening the door*] Miss Doolittle. [*She withdraws.*]

HIGGINS: [*rising hastily and running to Mrs Higgins*] Here she is, mother. [*He stands on tiptoe and makes signs over his mother's head to Eliza to indicate to her which lady is her hostess.*] Eliza, who is exquisitely dressed, produces an impression of such remarkable distinction and beauty as she enters that they all rise, quite fluttered. Guided by Higgins's signals, she comes to Mrs Higgins with studied grace.

LIZA : [*speaking with pedantic correctness of pronunciation and great beauty of tone*] How do you do, Mrs Higgins? [*She gasps slightly in making sure of the H in Higgins, but is quite successful.*] Mr Higgins told me I might come.

MRS HIGGINS: [*cordially*] Quite right: I'm very glad indeed to see you.

PICKERING: How do you do, Miss Doolittle?

LIZA: [*shaking hands with him*] Colonel Pickering, is it not?

MRS EYNSFORD HILL: I feel sure we have met before, Miss Doolittle. I remember your eyes.

LIZA: How do you do? [*She sits down on the ottoman gracefully in the place just left vacant by Higgins.*]

MRS EYNSFORD HILL: [*introducing*] My daughter Clara.

LIZA: How do you do?

CLARA: [*impulsively*] How do you do? [*She sits down on the ottoman beside Eliza, devouring her with her eyes.*]

FREDDY: [*coming to their side of the ottoman*] Ive certainly had the pleasure.

MRS EYNSFORD HILL: [*introducing*] My son Freddy.

LIZA: How do you do?

Freddy bows and sits down in the Elizabethan chair, infatuated.

HIGGINS: [*suddenly*] By George, yes: it all comes back to me! [*They stare at him.*] Covent

Garden! [*Lamentably*] What a damned thing!^o

MRS HIGGINS: Henry, please! [*He is about to sit on the edge of the table.*] Dont sit on my writing-table: youll break it.

HIGGINS: [*sulkily*] Sorry.

He goes to the divan, stumbling into the fender and over the fire-irons on his way; extricating himself with muttered imprecations; and finishing his disastrous journey by throwing himself so impatiently on the divan that he almost breaks it. Mrs Higgins looks at him, but controls herself and says nothing. A long and painful pause ensues.

MRS HIGGINS: [*at last, conversationally*] Will it rain, do you think?

LIZA: The shallow depression in the west of these islands is likely to move slowly in an easterly direction. There are no indications of any great change in the barometrical situation.

FREDDY: Ha! ha! how awfully funny!

LIZA: What is wrong with that, young man? I bet I got it right.

FREDDY: Killing!

MRS EYNSFORD HILL: I'm sure I hope it wont turn cold. Theres so much influenza about. It runs right through our whole family regularly every spring.

LIZA: [*darkly*] My aunt died of influenza: so they said.

MRS EYNSFORD HILL: [*clicks her tongue sympathetically*] !!!

LIZA: [*in the same tragic tone*] But it's my belief they done the old woman in.

MRS HIGGINS: [*puzzled*] Done her in?

LIZA: Y-e-e-e-es, Lord love you! Why should she die of influenza? She come through diphtheria right enough the year before. I saw her with my own eyes. Fairly blue with it, she was. They all thought she was dead; but my father he kept ladling gin down her throat til she came to so sudden that she bit the bowl off the spoon.

MRS EYNSFORD HILL: [*startled*] Dear me!

LIZA: [*piling up the indictment*] What call would a woman with that strength in her have to die of influenza? What become of her new straw hat that should have come to me? Somebody pinched it; and what I say is, them as pinched it done her in.

MRS EYNSFORD HILL: What does doing her in mean?

HIGGINS: [*hastily*] Oh, thats the new small talk. To do a person in means to kill them.

MRS EYNSFORD HILL: [*to Eliza, horrified*] You surely dont believe that your aunt was killed?

LIZA: Do I not! Them she lived with would have killed her for a hat-pin, let alone a hat.

MRS EYNSFORD HILL: But it cant have been right for your father to pour spirits down her throat like that. It might have killed her.

LIZA: Not her. Gin was mother's milk to her. Besides, he'd poured so much down his own throat that he knew the good of it.

MRS EYNSFORD HILL: Do you mean that he drank?

LIZA: Drank! My word! Something chronic.

^o **What a damned thing!** Higgins has just remembered where he and Eliza encountered the Eynsford Hills before—at Covent Garden in Act 1, where Eliza was selling violets.

MRS EYNSFORD HILL: How dreadful for you!

LIZA: Not a bit. It never did him no harm what I could see. But then he did not keep it up regular. [*Cheerfully*] On the burst, as you might say, from time to time. And always more agreeable when he had a drop in. When he was out of work, my mother used to give him fourpennce and tell him to go out and not come back until he'd drunk himself cheerful and loving-like. Theres lots of women has to make their husbands drunk to make them fit to live with. [*Now quite at her ease*] You see, it's like this. If a man has a bit of a conscience, it always takes him when he's sober; and then it makes him low-spirited. A drop of booze just takes that off and makes him happy. [*To Freddy, who is in convulsions of suppressed laughter*] Here! what are you sniggering at?

FREDDY: The new small talk. You do it so awfully well.

LIZA: If I was doing it proper, what was you laughing at? [*To Higgins*] Have I said anything I oughtnt?

MRS HIGGINS: [*interposing*] Not at all, Miss Doolittle.

LIZA: Well, thats a mercy, anyhow. [*Expansively*] What I always say is—

HIGGINS: [*rising and looking at his watch*] Ahem!

LIZA: [*looking round at him; taking the hint; and rising*] Well: I must go. [*They all rise. Freddy goes to the door.*] So pleased to have met you. Goodbye. [*She shakes hands with Mrs Higgins.*]

MRS HIGGINS: Goodbye.

LIZA: Goodbye, Colonel Pickering.

PICKERING: Goodbye, Miss Doolittle. [*They shake hands.*]

LIZA: [*nodding to the others*] Goodbye, all.

FREDDY: [*opening the door for her*] Are you walking across the Park, Miss Doolittle? If so—

LIZA: [*with perfectly elegant diction*] Walk! Not bloody likely.^o [*Sensation.*] I am going in a taxi. [*She goes out.*]

After the other guests have departed, somewhat shaken, Higgins questions his mother about how the experiment has gone:

HIGGINS: [*eagerly*] Well? Is Eliza presentable? [*He swoops on his mother and drags her to the ottoman, where she sits down in Eliza's place with her son on her left. Pickering returns to his chair on her right.*]

MRS HIGGINS: You silly boy, of course she's not presentable. She's a triumph of your art and of her dressmaker's; but if you suppose for a moment that she doesnt give herself away in every sentence she utters, you must be perfectly cracked about her.

PICKERING: But dont you think something might be done? I mean something to eliminate the sanguinary element from her conversation.

^o **Not bloody likely**: the phrase caused a theatrical sensation in 1912, when **bloody** was still a taboo word. In 1957 *My Fair Lady* had to substitute 'move your bloomin' arsel' to get a similar effect.

MRS HIGGINS: Not as long as she is in Henry's hands.

HIGGINS: [*aggrieved*] Do you mean that my language is improper?

MRS HIGGINS: No, dearest: it would be quite proper—say on a canal barge; but it would not be proper for her at a garden party.

HIGGINS: [*deeply injured*] Well I must say—

PICKERING: [*interrupting him*] Come, Higgins: you must learn to know yourself. I havnt heard such language as yours since we used to review the volunteers in Hyde Park twenty years ago.

HIGGINS: [*sulkily*] Oh, well, if you say so, I suppose I dont always talk like a bishop.

MRS HIGGINS: [*quieting Henry with a touch*] Colonel Pickering: will you tell me what is the exact state of things in Wimpole Street?

PICKERING: [*cheerfully: as if this completely changed the subject*] Well, I have come to live there with Henry. We work together at my Indian Dialects; and we think it more convenient—

MRS HIGGINS: Quite so. I know all about that: it's an excellent arrangement. But where does this girl live?

HIGGINS: With us, of course. Where *should* she live?

MRS HIGGINS: But on what terms? Is she a servant? If not, what is she?

PICKERING: [*slowly*] I think I know what you mean, Mrs Higgins.

HIGGINS: Well, dash me if I do! Ive had to work at the girl every day for months to get her to her present pitch. Besides, she's useful. She knows where my things are, and remembers my appointments and so forth.

MRS HIGGINS: How does your housekeeper get on with her?

HIGGINS: Mrs Pearce? Oh, she's jolly glad to get so much taken off her hands; for before Eliza came, she used to have to find things and remind me of my appointments. But she's got some silly bee in her bonnet about Eliza. She keeps saying 'You dont think, sir': doesnt she, Pick?

PICKERING: Yes: thats the formula. 'You dont think, sir.' Thats the end of every conversation about Eliza.

HIGGINS: As if I ever stop thinking about the girl and her confounded vowels and consonants. I'm worn out, thinking about her, and watching her lips and her teeth and her tongue, not to mention her soul, which is the quaintest of the lot.

MRS HIGGINS: You certainly are a pretty pair of babies, playing with your live doll.

HIGGINS: Playing! The hardest job I ever tackled: make no mistake about that, mother. But you have no idea how frightfully interesting it is to take a human being and change her into a quite different human being by creating a new speech for her. It's filling up the deepest gulf that separates class from class and soul from soul.

PICKERING: [*drawing his chair closer to Mrs Higgins and bending over to her eagerly*] Yes: it's enormously interesting. I assure you, Mrs Higgins, we take Eliza very seriously. Every week every day almost—there is some new change. [*Closer again*] We keep records of every stage—dozens of gramophone disks and photographs—

HIGGINS: [*assailing her at the other ear*] Yes, by George: it's the most absorbing experiment I ever tackled. She regularly fills our lives up: doesnt she, Pick?

PICKERING: We're always talking Eliza.

HIGGINS: Teaching Eliza.

PICKERING: Dressing Eliza.

MRS HIGGINS: What!

HIGGINS: Inventing new Elizas...

* * *

MRS HIGGINS:... Colonel Pickering: dont you realise that when Eliza walked into Wimpole Street, something walked in with her?

PICKERING: Her father did. But Henry soon got rid of him.

MRS HIGGINS: It would have been more to the point if her mother had. But as her mother didnt something else did.

PICKERING: But what?

MRS HIGGINS: [*unconsciously dating herself by the word*] A problem.

PICKERING: Oh I see. The problem of how to pass her off as a lady.

HIGGINS: I'll solve that problem. Ive half solved it already.

MRS HIGGINS: No, you two infinitely stupid male creatures: the problem of what is to be done with her afterwards.

HIGGINS: I dont see anything in that. She can go her own way, with all the advantages I have given her.

MRS HIGGINS: The advantages of that poor woman who was here just now!^o The manners and habits that disqualify a fine lady from earning her own living without giving her a fine lady's income! Is that what you mean?

PICKERING: [*indulgently, being rather bored*] Oh, that will be all right, Mrs Higgins. [*He rises to go.*]

HIGGINS: [*rising also*] We'll find her some light employment.

PICKERING: She's happy enough. Dont you worry about her. Goodbye. [*He shakes hands as if he were consoling a frightened child, and makes for the door.*]

HIGGINS: Anyhow, theres no good bothering now. The thing's done. Goodbye, mother. [*He kisses her, and follows Pickering.*]

PICKERING: [*turning for a final consolation*] There are plenty of openings. We'll do whats right. Goodbye.

HIGGINS: [*to Pickering as they go out together*] Lets take her to the Shakespeare exhibition at Earls Court.

PICKERING: Yes: lets. Her remarks will be delicious.

HIGGINS: She'll mimic all the people for us when we get home.

PICKERING: Ripping. [*Both are heard laughing as they go downstairs.*]

MRS HIGGINS: [*rises with an impatient bounce, and returns to her work at the writing-table.*]

^o **that poor woman...just now:** i.e. Mrs Eynsford Hill, a 'gentlewoman' in pathetically reduced circumstances.

She sweeps a litter of disarranged papers out of the way; snatches a sheet of paper from her stationery case; and tries resolutely to write. At the third time she gives it up; flings down her pen; grips the table angrily and exclaims] Oh, men! men!! men!!!

The experiment is finally a triumphant success: at the ambassador's garden party Eliza is passed off, not just as a duchess, but as a princess—a Hungarian princess, since she speaks English too perfectly to be English-born. But after the ball Higgins, having won his bet, treats her with complacent indifference, and she, infuriated by his attitude and in despair over her future, throws his slippers at him and walks out. The next day (Act 5) they confront each other at his mother's house.

HIGGINS: *[jumping up and walking about intolerantly]* Eliza: you're an idiot. I waste the treasures of my Miltonic mind by spreading them before you. Once for all, understand that I go my way and do my work without caring twopence what happens to either of us. I am not intimidated, like your father and your stepmother.^o So you can come back or go to the devil: which you please.

LIZA: What am I to come back for?

HIGGINS: *[bouncing up on his knees on the ottoman and leaning over it to her]* For the fun of it. That's why I took you on.

LIZA: *[with averted face]* And you may throw me out tomorrow if I don't do everything you want me to?

HIGGINS: Yes; and you may walk out tomorrow if I don't do everything you want me to.

LIZA: And live with my stepmother?

HIGGINS: Yes, or sell flowers.

LIZA: Oh! if I only could go back to my flower basket! I should be independent of both you and father and all the world! Why did you take my independence from me? Why did I give it up? I'm a slave now, for all my fine clothes.

HIGGINS: Not a bit. I'll adopt you as my daughter and settle money on you if you like. Or would you rather marry Pickering?

LIZA: *[looking fiercely round at him]* I wouldn't marry you if you asked me; and you're nearer my age than what he is.

HIGGINS: *[gently]* Than he is: not 'than what he is.'

LIZA: *[losing her temper and rising]* I'll talk as I like. You're not my teacher now.

HIGGINS: *[reflectively]* I don't suppose Pickering would, though. He's as confirmed an old bachelor as I am.

LIZA: That's not what I want; and don't you think it. I've always had chaps enough wanting me that way. Freddy Hill writes to me twice and three times a day, sheets and sheets.

HIGGINS: *[disagreeably surprised]* Damn his impudence! *[He recoils and finds himself sitting on his heels.]*

^o **your father and your stepmother:** the story of Eliza's father, Alfred Doolittle, is a comic subplot which mirrors Eliza's. Doolittle is a cheerfully amoral, drunken dustman who called himself one of the 'undeserving poor'; but, having inherited a fortune, he is gloomily forced to behave according to the dictates of 'middle class morality', including marrying his mistress (Eliza's 'stepmother').

LIZA: He has a right to if he likes, poor lad. And he does love me.

HIGGINS: [*getting off the ottoman*] You have no right to encourage him.

LIZA: Every girl has a right to be loved.

HIGGINS: What! By fools like that?

LIZA: Freddy's not a fool. And if he's weak and poor and wants me, may be he'd make me happier than my betters that bully me and dont want me.

HIGGINS: Can he make anything of you? Thats the point.

LIZA: Perhaps I could make something of him. But I never thought of us making anything of one another; and you never think of anything else. I only want to be natural.

HIGGINS: In short, you want me to be as infatuated about you as Freddy? Is that it?

LIZA: No I dont. Thats not the sort of feeling I want from you. And dont you be too sure of yourself or of me. I could have been a bad girl if I'd liked. Ive seen more of some things than you, for all your learning. Girls like me can drag gentlemen down to make love to them easy enough. And they wish each other dead the next minute.

HIGGINS: Of course they do. Then what in thunder are we quarrelling about?

LIZA: [*much troubled*] I want a little kindness. I know I'm a common ignorant girl, and you a book-learned gentleman; but I'm not dirt under your feet. What I done [*correcting herself*] what I did was not for the dresses and the taxis: I did it because we were pleasant together and I come—came—to care for you; not to want you to make love to me, and not forgetting the difference between us, but more friendly like.

HIGGINS: Well, of course. Thats just how I feel. And how Pickering feels. Eliza: youre a fool.

LIZA: Thats not a proper answer to give me [*she sinks on the chair at the writing-table in tears*].

HIGGINS: It's all youll get until you stop being a common idiot. If youre going to be a lady, youll have to give up feeling neglected if the men you know dont spend half their time snivelling over you and the other half giving you black eyes. If you cant stand the coldness of my sort of life, and the strain of it, go back to the gutter. Work til youre more a brute than a human being; and then cuddle and squabble and drink til you fall asleep. Oh, it's a fine life, the life of the gutter. It's real: it's warm: it's violent: you can feel it through the thickest skin: you can taste it and smell it without any training or any work. Not like Science and Literature and Classical Music and Philosophy and Art. You find me cold, unfeeling, selfish, dont you? Very well: be off with you to the sort of people you like. Marry some sentimental hog or other with lots of money, and a thick pair of lips to kiss you with and a thick pair of boots to kick you with. If you cant appreciate what youve got, youd better get what you can appreciate.

LIZA: [*desperate*] Oh, you are a cruel tyrant. I cant talk to you: you turn everything against me: I'm always in the wrong. But you know very well all the time that youre nothing but a bully. You know I cant go back to the gutter, as you call it, and that I have no real friends in the world but you and the Colonel. You know well I couldnt bear to live with a low common man after you two; and it's wicked and cruel of you to insult me by pretending I could. You think I must go back to Wimpole Street because I have nowhere else to go but father's. But dont you be too sure that you have me under your feet to be trampled on and talked down. I'll marry Freddy, I will, as soon as I'm able to support him.

HIGGINS: [*thunderstruck*] Freddy!!! that young fool! That poor devil who couldnt get a job as an errand boy even if he had the guts to try for it! Woman: do you not understand that I have made you a consort for a king?

LIZA: Freddy loves me: that makes him king enough for me. I dont want him to work: he wasnt brought up to it as I was. I'll go and be a teacher.

HIGGINS: Whatll you teach, in heaven's name?

LIZA: What you taught me. I'll teach phonetics.

HIGGINS: Ha! ha! ha!

LIZA: I'll offer myself as an assistant to that hairyfaced Hungarian.^o

HIGGINS: [*rising in fury*] What! That impostor! that humbug! that toadying ignoramus! Teach him my methods! my discoveries! You take one step in his direction and I'll wring your neck. [*He lays hands on her*] Do you hear?

LIZA: [*defiantly non-resistant*] Wring away. What do I care? I knew you'd strike me some day. [*He lets her go, stamping with rage at having forgotten himself, and recoils so hastily that he stumbles back into his seat on the ottoman.*] Aha! Now I know how to deal with you. What a fool I was not to think of it before! You cant take away the knowledge you gave me. You said I had a finer ear than you. And I can be civil and kind to people, which is more than you can. Aha! [*Purposely dropping her aitches to annoy him*] Thats done you, Enry Iggins, it az. Now I dont care that [*snapping her fingers*] for your bullying and your big talk. I'll advertize it in the papers that your duchess is only a flower girl that you taught, and that she'll teach anybody to be a duchess just the same in six months for a thousand guineas. Oh, when I think of myself crawling under your feet and being trampled on and called names, when all the time I had only to lift up my finger to be as good as you, I could just kick myself.

HIGGINS: [*wondering at her*] You damned impudent slut, you! But it's better than snivelling; better than fetching slippers and finding spectacles, isnt it? [*Rising*] By George, Eliza, I said I'd make a woman of you; and I have. I like you like this.

LIZA: Yes: you turn round and make up to me now that I'm not afraid of you, and can do without you.

HIGGINS: Of course I do, you little fool. Five minutes ago you were like a millstone round my neck. Now youre a tower of strength: a consort battleship. You and I and Pickering will be three old bachelors instead of only two men and a silly girl.

Despite Higgins's arguments, Eliza leaves, and the play ends as Higgins 'roars with laughter' at the prospect of her marrying Freddy. Shaw adds a prose epilogue to explain what happens next.

The rest of the story need not be shewn^o in action, and indeed, would hardly need telling if our imaginations were not so enfeebled by their lazy dependence on the ready-mades and reach-me-downs of the ragshop in which Romance keeps its stock of 'happy endings' to misfit all stories. Now, the history of Eliza Doolittle, though called a romance because

^o **that hairyfaced Hungarian:** Nepommuck, a former pupil of Higgins, who uses his methods to detect (and blackmail) social imposters.

^o **shewn:** shown (Shaw's old-fashioned spelling).

the transfiguration it records seems exceedingly improbable, is common enough. Such transfigurations have been achieved by hundreds of resolutely ambitious young women since Nell Gwynne^o set them the example by playing queens and fascinating kings in the theatre in which she began by selling oranges. Nevertheless, people in all directions have assumed, for no other reason than that she became the heroine of a romance, that she must have married the hero of it. This is unbearable, not only because her little drama, if acted on such a thoughtless assumption, must be spoiled, but because the true sequel is patent to anyone with a sense of human nature in general, and of feminine instinct in particular.

Shaw argues that strong people are naturally attracted to those weaker than themselves, not stronger.

Eliza has no use for the foolish romantic tradition that all women love to be mastered, if not actually bullied and beaten... This being the state of human affairs, what is Eliza fairly sure to do when she is placed between Freddy and Higgins? Will she look forward to a lifetime of fetching Higgins's slippers or to a lifetime of Freddy fetching hers? There can be no doubt about the answer. Unless Freddy is biologically repulsive to her, and Higgins biologically attractive to a degree that overwhelms all her other instincts, she will, if she marries either of them, marry Freddy.

And that is just what Eliza did.

Shaw goes on to describe the fairly successful marriage between Eliza and Freddy, and how, with financial aid from Higgins and Pickering, they eventually make a precarious success of their florist's business. He concludes:

[Eliza] is immensely interested in [Higgins]. She even has secret mischievous moments in which she wishes she could get him alone, on a desert island, away from all ties and with nobody else in the world to consider, and just drag him off his pedestal and see him making love like any common man. We all have private imaginations of that sort. But when it comes to business, to the life that she really leads as distinguished from the life of dreams and fancies, she likes Freddy and she likes the Colonel; and she does not like Higgins and Mr Doolittle. Galatea never does quite like Pygmalion: his relation to her is too godlike to be altogether agreeable.

P25 H.D., 'Pygmalion', 1917^o

On H.D., see headnote to O39

1

Shall I let myself be caught
in my own light?
shall I let myself be broken

^o **Nell Gwynne:** a Restoration actress who started out selling oranges in the theatre, and became Charles II's mistress.

^o from *Collected Poems 1912-1944*, ed. Louis L.Martz, New York: New Directions, 1983, pp. 48-50. © 1982 The Estate of Hilda Doolittle. Reprinted by permission of Carcanet Press Ltd and New Directions Publishing Corporation.

cries out from a perfect throat:
you are useless,
no marble can bind me,
 45 *no stone suggest.*

5

They have melted into the light
 and I am desolate;
 they have melted;
 each from his plinth,
 50 each one departs;
 they have gone;
 what agony can express my grief?
 each from his marble base
 has stepped into the light
 55 and my work is for naught.

6

Now am I the power
 that has made this fire
 as of old I made the gods
 start from the rocks?
 60 am I the god?
 or does this fire carve me
 for its use?

**P26 Robert Graves, 'Pygmalion to Galatea', 1925, and
 'Galatea and Pygmalion', 1938***

Robert Graves, 1895–1985, English poet, novelist, critic, and translator, resident for much of his life on the Spanish island of Mallorca. Graves is a major twentieth-century poet, whose work is largely based on a personal mythology and theory of poetry expounded in *The White Goddess* (1948); he also wrote novels on historical and mythological themes (*I, Claudius*; *King Jesus*; *Hercules, My Shipmate*), translated several Latin authors, and compiled a readable though eccentric summary of *The Greek Myths* (1955). These two poems present sharply opposed views of the Pygmalion myth.

(a) *Pygmalion to Galatea*

Pygmalion spoke and sang to Galatea
 Who keeping to her pedestal in doubt
 Of these new qualities, blood, bones and breath,

* from (a) *Poems (1914–26)*, London: Heinemann, 1927, pp. 201–2; (b) *Collected Poems*, London: Cassell, 1938, p. 109. Reprinted by permission of Carcanet Press Ltd.

Nor yet relaxing her accustomed poise,
 5 Her Parian^o rigour, though alive and burning,
 Heard out his melody:

‘As you are woman, so be lovely:
 Fine hair afloat and eyes irradiate,
 Long crafty fingers, fearless carriage,
 10 And body lissom, neither small nor tall;
 So be lovely!

‘As you are lovely, so be merciful:
 Yet must your mercy abstain from pity:
 Prize your self-honour, leaving me with mine:
 15 Love if you will: or stay stone-frozen.
 So be merciful!

‘As you are merciful, so be constant:
 I ask not you should mask your comeliness,
 Yet keep our love aloof and strange,
 20 Keep it from gluttonous eyes, from stairway gossip.
 So be constant!

‘As you are constant, so be various:
 Love comes to sloth without variety.
 Within the limits of our fair-paved garden
 25 Let fancy like a Proteus range and change.
 So be various!

‘As you are various, so be woman:
 Graceful in going as well armed in doing.
 Be witty, kind, enduring, unsubjected:
 30 Without you I keep heavy house.
 So be woman!

‘As you are woman, so be lovely:
 As you are lovely, so be various,
 Merciful as constant, constant as various.
 35 So be mine, as I yours for ever.’

Then as the singing ceased and the lyre ceased,
 Down stepped proud Galatea with a sigh.

‘Pygmalion, as you woke me from the stone,
 40 So shall I you from bonds of sullen flesh.

Lovely I am, merciful I shall prove:
 Woman I am, constant as various,
 Not marble-hearted but your own true love.
 Give me an equal kiss, as I kiss you.’

(b) Galatea and Pygmalion

Galatea, whom his furious chisel
 From Parian stone had by greed enchanted,

^o **Parian:** i.e. marble.

Fulfilled, so they say, Pygmalion's longings:
 Stepped from the pedestal on which she stood,
 5 Bare in his bed laid her down, lubricious,
 With low responses to his drunken raptures,
 Enroyalled his body with her demon blood.
 Alas, Pygmalion had so well plotted
 The art-perfection of his woman monster
 10 That schools of eager connoisseurs beset
 Her famous person with perennial suit;
 Whom she (a judgement on the jealous artist)
 Admitted rankly to a comprehension
 Of themes that crowned her own, not his repute.

P27 C.Day Lewis, 'The Perverse', 1928°

Cecil Day Lewis, 1904–72, British poet, novelist, and translator, born in Ireland but raised in England; a communist and a member of the left-wing 'Auden group' in the 1930s, he later became more conservative, and was Poet Laureate 1968–72; his translation of Virgil (see **O2**) is among his best work.

Love being denied, he turned in his despair
 And couched° with the Absolute a summer through;
 He got small joy of the skimpy bedfellow—
 Formulas gave no body to lay bare.

5 His pretty came among the primroses
 With open breast for him. No more denied
 Seemed no more ideal. He was unsatisfied
 Till he strained her flesh to thin philosophies.
 Love being remote, dreams at the midnight gave
 10 A chill enchanted image of her flesh;
 Such phantoms but inflamed his waking wish
 For the quick° beauty no dream-chisels grave.
 Now she was won. But our Pygmalion—
 If so he could have graven like a kiss
 15 On Time's blank shoulder that hour of loveliness
 —He would have changed her body into stone.

° from *The Complete Poems*, London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1992. © 1992 The Estate of C. Day Lewis. Reprinted by permission of The Estate of C. Day Lewis and Random House UK Ltd.

° **couched**: slept.

° **quick**: living.

**P28 Angela Carter, from 'The Loves of Lady Purple',
1974^o**

Angela Carter, 1940–1992, English novelist and short story writer, whose works include *The Magic Toyshop* (1967), *The Bloody Chamber* (1979), and *Wise Children* (1991). Often classed as 'magical realism', Carter's tales take place in what she calls in this story 'a no-man's-land between the real and that which... seems to be real'; baroquely ornate in style, coolly detached in tone, they draw knowingly on a wide range of earlier myths, folktales, and literary motifs. 'The Loves of Lady Purple', the tale of a puppetmaster and his doll, does not explicitly refer to Pygmalion, but that story is clearly one of its inspirations—along with those of Frankenstein, Dracula, and Pinocchio.

Inside the pink-striped booth of the Asiatic Professor only the marvellous existed and there was no such thing as daylight.

The puppet master is always dusted with a little darkness. In direct relation to his skill he propagates the most bewildering enigmas for, the more lifelike his marionettes, the more godlike his manipulations and the more radical the symbiosis between inarticulate doll and articulating fingers. The puppeteer speculates in a no-man's-land between the real and that which, although we know very well it is not, nevertheless seems to be real. He is the intermediary between us, his audience, the living, and they, the dolls, the undead, who cannot live at all and yet who mimic the living in every detail since, though they cannot speak or weep, still they project those signals of signification we instantly recognize as language.

The master of marionettes vitalizes inert stuff with the dynamics of his self. The sticks dance, make love, pretend to speak and, finally, personate death; yet, so many Lazaruses out of their graves they spring again in time for the next performance and no worms drip from their noses nor dust clogs their eyes. All complete, they once again offer their brief imitations of men and women with an exquisite precision which is all the more disturbing because we know it to be false; and so this art, if viewed theologically, may, perhaps, be blasphemous.

Although he was only a poor travelling showman, the Asiatic Professor had become a consummate virtuoso of puppetry. He transported his collapsible theatre, the cast of his single drama and a variety of properties in a horse-drawn cart and, after he played his play in many beautiful cities which no longer exist, such as Shanghai, Constantinople and St Petersburg, he and his small entourage arrived at last in a country in Middle Europe where the mountains sprout jags as sharp and unnatural as those a child outlines with his crayon, a dark, superstitious Transylvania where they wreathed suicides with garlic, pierced them through the heart with stakes and buried them at crossroads while warlocks continually practised rites of immemorial beastliness in the forests.

...[The aged Professor] revealed his passions through a medium other than himself and this was his heroine, the puppet, Lady Purple.

^o from 'The Loves of Lady Purple', in *Fireworks*, London: Quartet Books, 1974. © Angela Carter 1974, 1987. Reprinted by permission of The Estate of Angela Carter c/o Rogers, Coleridge & White Ltd, 20 Powis Mews, London W11 1JN.

She was the Queen of Night. There were glass rubies in her head for eyes and her ferocious teeth, carved out of mother o' pearl, were always on show for she had a permanent smile. Her face was as white as chalk because it was covered with the skin of supplest white leather which also clothed her torso, jointed limbs and complication of extremities. Her beautiful hands seemed more like weapons because her nails were so long, five inches of pointed tin enamelled scarlet, and she wore a wig of black hair arranged in a chignon^o more heavily elaborate than any human neck could have endured. This monumental chevelure^o was stuck through with many brilliant pins tipped with pieces of broken mirror so that, every time she moved, she cast a multitude of scintillating reflections which danced about the theatre like mice of light. Her clothes were all of deep, dark, slumbrous colours—profound pinks, crimson and the vibrating purple with which she was synonymous, a purple the colour of blood in a love suicide.

She must have been the masterpiece of a long-dead, anonymous artisan and yet she was nothing but a curious structure until the Professor touched her strings, for it was he who filled her with necromantic vigour. He transmitted to her an abundance of the life he himself seemed to possess so tenuously and, when she moved, she did not seem so much a cunningly simulated woman as a monstrous goddess, at once preposterous and magnificent, who transcended the notion she was dependent on his hands and appeared wholly real and yet entirely other. Her actions were not so much an imitation as a distillation and intensification of those of a born woman and so she could become the quintessence of eroticism, for no woman born would have dared to be so blatantly seductive.

The Professor allowed no one else to touch her. He himself looked after her costumes and jewellery. When the show was over, he placed his marionette in a specially constructed box and carried her back to the lodging house where he and his children shared a room, for she was too precious to be left in the flimsy theatre and, besides, he could not sleep unless she lay beside him.

Carter describes the luridly melodramatic action of the Professor's play: *The Notorious Amours of Lady Purple, the Shameless Oriental Venus*. Lady Purple begins her career by murdering her family, burning down their home, and taking up residence at the local brothel. She becomes a famous courtesan, dominatrix, and vamp, 'the image of irresistible evil', who drains her lovers of wealth and health and, when she is bored with them, murders them. Her pyrotechnical career ends 'in ashes, desolation, and silence': in 'the final scene of her desperate decline', wandering the seashore in rags,

she practised extraordinary necrophilias on the bloated corpses the sea tossed contemptuously at her feet for her dry rapacity had become entirely mechanical and still she repeated her former actions though she herself was utterly other. She abrogated her humanity. She became a marionette herself, herself her own replica, the dead yet moving image of the shameless Oriental Venus.

...The rough audience received their copeck's worth of sensation and filed out into a fairground which still roared like a playful tiger with life. The foundling girl put away

- ° **chignon:** roll or knot of hair at the back of the head.
- ° **chevelure:** hairdo.

her samisen^o and swept out the booth while the nephew set the stage afresh for next day's matinee. Then the Professor noticed Lady Purple had ripped a seam in the drab shroud she wore in the final act. Chattering to himself with displeasure, he undressed her as she swung idly, this way and that way, from her anchored strings and then he sat down on a wooden property stool on the stage and plied his needle like a good housewife. The task was more difficult than it seemed at first for the fabric was also torn and required an embroidery of darning so he told his assistants to go home together to the lodging house and let him finish his task alone.

A small oil-lamp hanging from a nail at the side of the stage cast an insufficient but tranquil light. The white puppet glimmered fitfully through the mists which crept into the theatre from the night outside through all the chinks and gaps in the tarpaulin and now began to fold their chiffon drapes around her as if to decorously conceal her or else to render her more translucently enticing. The mist softened her painted smile a little and her head dangled to one side. In the last act, she wore a loose, black wig, the locks of which hung down as far as her softly upholstered flanks, and the ends of her hair flickered with her random movements, creating upon the white blackboard of her back one of those fluctuating optical effects which make us question the veracity of our vision. As he often did when he was alone with her, the Professor chatted to her in his native language, rattling away an intimacy of nothings, of the weather, of his rheumatism, of the unpalatability and expense of the region's coarse, black bread, while the small winds took her as their partner in a scarcely perceptible valse triste^o and the mist grew minute by minute thicker, more pallid and more viscous.

The old man finished his mending. He rose and, with a click or two of his old bones, he went to put the forlorn garment neatly on its green-room hanger beside the glowing, winy purple gown splashed with rosy peonies, sashed with carmine, that she wore for her appalling dance. He was about to lay her, naked, in her coffin-shaped case and carry her back to their chilly bedroom when he paused. He was seized with the childish desire to see her again in all her finery once more that night. He took her dress off its hanger and carried it to where she drifted, at nobody's volition but that of the wind. As he put her clothes on her, he murmured to her as if she were a little girl for the vulnerable flaccidity of her arms and legs made a six-foot baby of her.

'There, there, my pretty; this arm here, that's right! Oops a daisy, easy does it...'

Then he tenderly took off her penitential wig and clucked his tongue to see how defencelessly bald she was beneath it. His arms cracked under the weight of her immense chignon and he had to stretch up on tiptoe to set it in place because, since she was as large as life, she was rather taller than he. But then the ritual of apparelling was over and she was complete again.

Now she was dressed and decorated, it seemed her dry wood had all at once put out an entire springtime of blossoms for the old man alone to enjoy. She could have acted as the model for the most beautiful of women, the image of that woman whom only a man's memory and imagination can devise, for the lamplight fell too mildly to sustain her air of arrogance and so gently it made her long nails look as harmless as ten fallen petals. The Professor had a curious habit; he always used to kiss his doll good night.

- **samisen:** Japanese stringed instrument.
- **valse triste:** sad waltz.

A child kisses its toy before she pretends it sleeps although, even though she is only a child, she knows its eyes are not constructed to close so it will always be a sleeping beauty no kiss will waken. One in the grip of savage loneliness might kiss the face he sees before him in the mirror for want of any other face to kiss. These are kisses of the same kind; they are the most poignant of caresses, for they are too humble and too despairing to wish or seek for any response.

Yet, in spite of the Professor's sad humility, his chapped and withered mouth opened on hot, wet, palpitating flesh.

The sleeping wood had wakened. Her pearl teeth crashed against his with the sound of cymbals and her warm, fragrant breath blew around him like an Italian gale. Across her suddenly moving face flashed a whole kaleidoscope of expression, as though she were running instantaneously through the entire repertory of human feeling, practising, in an endless moment of time, all the scales of emotion as if they were music. Crushing vines, her arms, curled about the Professor's delicate apparatus of bone and skin with the insistent pressure of an actuality by far more authentically living than that of his own, time-desiccated flesh. Her kiss emanated from the dark country where desire is objectified and lives. She gained entry into the world by a mysterious loophole in its metaphysics and, during her kiss, she sucked his breath from his lungs so that her own bosom heaved with it.

So, unaided, she began her next performance with an apparent improvisation which was, in reality, only a variation upon a theme. She sank her teeth into his throat and drained him. He did not have the time to make a sound. When he was empty, he slipped straight out of her embrace down to her feet with a dry rustle, as of a cast armful of dead leaves, and there he sprawled on the floorboards, as empty, useless and bereft of meaning as his own tumbled shawl.

She tugged impatiently at the strings which moored her and out they came in bunches from her head, her arms and her legs. She stripped them off her fingertips and stretched out her long, white hands, flexing and unflexing them again and again. For the first time for years, or, perhaps, for ever, she closed her blood-stained teeth thankfully, for her cheeks still ached from the smile her maker had carved into the stuff of her former face. She stamped her elegant feet to make the new blood flow more freely there.

Unfurling and unravelling itself, her hair leaped out of its confinements of combs, cords and lacquer to root itself back into her scalp like cut grass bounding out of the stack and back again into the ground. First, she shivered with pleasure to feel the cold, for she realized she was experiencing a physical sensation; then either she remembered or else she believed she remembered that the sensation of cold was not a pleasurable one so she knelt and, drawing off the old man's shawl, wrapped it carefully about herself. Her every motion was instinct with a wonderful, reptilian liquidity. The mist outside now seemed to rush like a tide into the booth and broke against her in white breakers so that she looked like a baroque figurehead, lone survivor of a shipwreck, thrown up on a shore by the tide.

But whether she was renewed or newly born, returning to life or becoming alive, awakening from a dream or coalescing into the form of a fantasy generated in her wooden skull by the mere repetition so many times of the same invariable actions, the brain beneath the reviving hair contained only the scantiest notion of the possibilities now open to it. All that

had seeped into the wood was the notion that she might perform the forms of life not so much by the skill of another as by her own desire that she did so, and she did not possess enough equipment to comprehend the complex circularity of the logic which inspired her for she had only been a marionette. But, even if she could not perceive it, she could not escape the tautological paradox in which she was trapped; had the marionette all the time parodied the living or was she, now living, to parody her own performance as a marionette? Although she was now manifestly a woman, young and beautiful, the leprous whiteness of her face gave her the appearance of a corpse animated solely by demonic will.

Deliberately, she knocked the lamp down from its hook on the wall. A puddle of oil spread at once on the boards of the stage. A little flame leaped across the fuel and immediately began to eat the curtains. She went down the aisle between the benches to the little ticket booth. Already, the stage was an inferno and the corpse of the Professor tossed this way and that on an uneasy bed of fire. But she did not look behind her after she slipped out into the fairground although soon the theatre was burning like a paper lantern ignited by its own candle.

Now it was so late that the sideshows, gingerbread stalls and liquor booths were locked and shuttered and only the moon, half obscured by drifting cloud, gave out a meagre, dirty light, which sullied and deformed the flimsy pasteboard facades, so the place, deserted, with curds of vomit, the refuse of revelry, underfoot, looked utterly desolate.

She walked rapidly past the silent roundabouts, accompanied only by the fluctuating mists, towards the town, making her way like a homing pigeon, out of logical necessity, to the single brothel it contained.

P29 Michael Longley, 'Ivory and Water', 1994^o

Michael Longley, born 1939, Northern Irish poet, and administrator for the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. 'Ivory and Water', which fuses the Pygmalion story with Ovid's descriptions of the metamorphoses of Cyane and Arethusa into water (*Metamorphoses*, book 5), first appeared in the anthology *After Ovid* (1994).

Ivory and Water

If as a lonely bachelor who disapproves of women
 You carve the perfect specimen out of snow-white ivory
 And fall in love with your masterpiece and make love to her
 (Or try to), stroking, fondling, whispering, kissing, nervous
 5 In case you bruise ivory like flesh with prodding fingers,
 And bring sea-shells, shiny pebbles, song-birds, colourful wild
 Flowers, amber beads, orchids, beach-balls as her presents,
 And put real women's clothes, wedding rings, ear-rings, long
 Necklaces, a brassière on the statue, then undress her

^o from *The Ghost Orchid*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1995, p. 15. Reprinted by permission of the author and Jonathan Cape.